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INCENTIVES MAY HELP NETHERLANDS EXPAND OUTPUT OF BEEF

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market prices for beef have remained above guaranteed prices, most producers are more influenced by official prices than market prices in considering long-term shifts in resource use.

Price relationships between beef, milk, and/or veal, however, have influenced short-term beef output. For example, production of beef in 1969 rose by 27,400 tons, reflecting lower milk prices and heavy culling of herds. On the other hand, higher milk prices increased dairy farmers' returns in 1972 and fewer cows were culled, resulting in a 40,500-ton drop in beef production. Beef output, however, has averaged a fairly stable 200,000 tons annually since 1964.

Weights of cattle slaughtered for beef have trended downward during the last decade—a contrast to the rising trend in other EC countries, excepting the United Kingdom. Dressed carcass weight is forecast to average 533.5 pounds in 1973, compared with an average of 590.8 pounds for 1961-63.

In 1971, some 100,780 beef steers were slaughtered, most at 15 months of age or less. In 1973, total slaughter is expected to total 115,000 head, the majority over 15 months of age.

VEAL PRODUCTION now totals about 100,000 tons per year—three times the 1957 output—owing to increased numbers and heavier calves. Strong export demand has stimulated this expansion, as well as subsidized nonfat dry milk supplies. Vealer slaughter has exceeded cattle slaughter since 1968.

According to research by the Dutch Agricultural Economic Research Institute (LEI), based on 600 steers on an experimental farm, net producer returns in 1972 from a 16-month, 961-pound steer averaged $96 per steer. Production costs per steer, less labor, amounted to $435.44. At a market price of 55 cents per pound, gross returns totaled $531.43.

This year, rising production costs are likely to diminish producer returns substantially. Calf and feed costs, increasing most rapidly, were found to account for over 80 percent of producer costs, not including labor.

Potential for increasing beef cattle numbers appears greatest in mixed farming areas, where relatively small herds are produced in conjunction with other farming activities. Moreover, more cattle are being fattened on corn silage and beet pulp, which in certain arable areas might increase profits to close to dairy returns on the same farm.

Trends towards part-time farming could boost beef cattle production. Manpower requirements for beef are generally less than for milk production, and cattle raising can usually be combined with off-farm employment. Shorter hours could also be attractive to older farmers, who would be willing to trade lower incomes for the advantages of raising beef cattle.

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